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ABSTRACT

Deconstruction for reconstruction is a classroom teaching technique designed to help students improve writing skills. The objective is to write natural expanded sentences that fit in a cohesive paragraph. The technique evolved from observation of many intermediate and upper-intermediate students of English as a Second Language for whom writing organized, coherent texts with fully developed sentences was difficult. Deconstruction activities have students break down faulty sentences or paragraphs into a group of kernel sentences, then reorganize and combine them to form a single expanded sentence. Choice of text depends on the activity's purpose in the overall lesson or course plan, whether focusing on grammar or organization. General guidelines are offered for preparing such an exercise and for classroom implementation. Examples are provided of deconstruction of a native English speaker's narrative description, an original student text that has been revised, a native speaker's descriptive text, and a student text with problems. It is noted from experience that several exercises are needed to produce results, students respond positively to the experience, and the technique has been effective with intermediate and upper-intermediate level learners. Student comments, teacher comments, and student writing samples are included. (MSE)

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Deconstruction for Reconstruction as a Way to Better Writing

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FL 024608

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Demonstration: Deconstruction for reconstruction as a way to better writing
Proposal: 3368
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March 12, 1997

INTRODUCTION

Deconstruction for reconstruction is a technique to help students improve their writing skills. The focus is at the sentence level; to write natural, expanded sentences that fit in a unified paragraph.

This technique was born out of the observation of many intermediate and upper-intermediate students who have difficulty writing organized, coherent texts with fully developed sentences. Many times their writing roughly resembles the underlying structures before the final transformations are applied as described in generative grammar (Chomsky: 1965). These students tend to write choppy paragraphs, with several short simple sentences, or simple compound sentences juxtaposed by *and*, which is often a reflection of the language used in oral communication.

Example: "It's summer. The day is light. The sun shines strongly. The sky is blue and clean."

Instead of a more natural ... On a light summer day, the sun shines in the clean, blue sky.

Other times, students may write long sentences with complete ideas that are not sequenced or combined to form a unified text.

Example: ... "This glacial scenery was made up of infinite shades of blue and gray. On the beach, the dark and hard sand. There were *imponent* mountains right after the rocky sand, not very far from the sea, and in some places, the waves could even reach the rocks, going with violence against it - this made impressive noises. ..."

The idea for the activity is to break down, or deconstruct, faulty sentences or paragraphs into a list or group of "kernel sentences" - roughly a simple noun phrase and a simple verb phrase that carry minimal meanings. These groups of sentences are put together so they can naturally form one single expanded sentence with connectors and/or subordinators if necessary. The block format serves to show the students what is meant by that string of ideas. (see page 3)

The objective is to teach how sets of meanings can collapse into a single different form. It also shows the repeated words to be deleted, the redundant phrases and the elements to be compounded or sequenced; besides, the exercise helps learners understand and judge the semantic relationship among the bits of meaning.

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A second step is to recombine, or reconstruct, the lists of sentences into one fully developed sentence using a more natural sentence pattern, one that is adequate for written (as opposed to spoken) language. The student's task is to collapse the sentences by eliminating repetition and redundancy, using the adequate word order for noun modifiers and adverbials (complete and reduced clauses and adverbs), and adding conjunctions and subordinators when necessary.

TYPES AND APPLICATIONS

The choice of text or excerpt to be deconstructed depends on the purpose of the activity in the overall lesson or course plan. Whether the focus is on using adjectives for a descriptive text, or adverbs in a narrative, or on adding reduced clauses, adjective clauses or adverbial clauses to sentences, or even all of that together. Other times the focus could lie on rearranging ideas for more effective style or coherence. Whichever the case, it is it is up to the teacher to decide what to use, what examples to give and how to present the activity.

Different original texts serve different purposes: pre-writing, focusing on organization, sequencing and sentence development; or preparation for revision.

The exercises can be prepared from texts written by a native speaker, the actual text with problems written by a student (from another or the same class) or from a good text by a good student. (See examples)

HOW TO DECONSTRUCT A TEXT

GENERAL DIRECTIONS TO PREPARE AN EXERCISE

- Select or write a text to deconstruct that serves the pedagogical objectives of the course or program.

Kind Of Text	*Linguistic Objectives*	*Use*
Short description of a place or person	✦ using adjective order ✦ using long noun phrases ✦ using several adverbs in the sentence	✦ as pre-writing ✦ as model for description ✦ as input for revision
Short narrative text	✦ using adjective order ✦ using long noun phrases ✦ using several adverbs in the sentence ✦ using time markers, time subordinators ✦ reduced clauses	✦ as pre-writing ✦ as model for narrative ✦ as input for revision focusing on organization and sequence of events
Short student text or excerpt of text with problems	✦ finding gaps in sequence of events or time ✦ finding problems with spatial organization ✦ finding missing ideas or links ✦ identifying relationships between separate ideas ✦ using anaphoric reference	✦ as input for revision to improve unity and coherence

- Isolate each sentence, break it down into units of (subject + verb) or (subject + verb + one complement). The amount of "chunking" depends on the linguistic objective; however, the more you chunk, the harder the exercise for the student.
- List these sentences in an order they will naturally combine.
- If necessary, **list clues** to help sentence combination. For example: connectors or subordinators to be used, adequate reduced forms, a type of transition, etc.

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM PROCEDURES

GENERAL HINTS

- Do the exercise in pairs, small groups or individually.
- Do a couple of examples to show the class the different possibilities of sentence combination.
- Monitor to ensure students understand the exercise and use adequate forms.
- An exercise of one-average-paragraph will take small groups or pairs 20 minutes.

SPECIFIC HINTS

1. Prepare the exercise according to the pedagogical objectives desired.
2. Present the objectives of the activity to the students:

> The reconstruction exercise is a pre-writing or revision activity meant to help students understand the underlying structures of a well-constructed sentence in English. This involves practice in combining sets or groups of simple sentences into fully developed ideas.

3. The **first time** you teach the exercise, use an overlay on an OHP so it becomes a joint activity between teacher and class.
4. Give some clues as part of the directions.
   Examples: Consider: deleting all redundant words and phrases;
   arranging adjectives before head nouns;
   using full or reduced adjective clauses;
   using *-ing* phrases with adverbial meaning;
   arranging different adverbs in order after the verb;
   using **and** only when it means addition; and
   using time words to indicate time sequences
5. Do one or two groups of sentences with the class to help students understand the task.
   - ✦ Point out which repeated words or redundant phrases can be deleted.
   - ✦ Show how word order can be altered.
   - ✦ Suggest or elicit an extended noun phrase with its determiners and adjectives as example
6. Read the rewritten sentence aloud to emphasize the importance of the natural flow of ideas.
7. Always allow, or even explore, different acceptable alternatives for sentence combination: this practice can show the flexibility of the language and develop students' sensitivity to style.
8. When working with deconstructed texts that originate from faulty writing, with organization and coherence problems, **capitalize on student participation**. Encourage them to identify the problem and to propose different solutions. Write alternatives on the blackboard. Then have students compare these alternatives and discuss their strengths in flow, style, clarity, etc.
9. Let pairs or small groups continue the task.
10. **Monitor** closely to ensure the best solutions to the exercises.
11. On **subsequent classes**, give a second or third exercise on a handout. Again it is essential that examples be given and alternatives be discussed with the students before they can work on their own.

EXAMPLES

Example of deconstruction of narrative description of a place written by a native speaker

Original text

> Lifting my leg high, I stepped over the hotel guardhouse chain. I started walking under the light of the electric lamp posts and feeling the blowing wind of the deserted ocean-side of Natal. The smooth bike path along the shore invited me to run. The sound of the waves on the rocky beach drew my attention to the light gray horizon blending up into the darker sky speckled with twinkling stars. As I started to run, I imagined the sun shining on me and warming the cool wind that pierced through my sweatshirt. In a few minutes my pace and breathing were steady, and there was that warm, light golden ball appearing on the horizon, changing its backdrop to orange, salmon, gray and light blue. The ripples on the surface of the calm water indicated good weather for this first day of vacation.

DIRECTIONS: Combine *each group* of sentences to form *one long* expanded and developed sentence.

CLUES: Eliminate repeated words,
use: adjectives before nouns,
reduced clauses with gerunds and infinitives,
punctuation,
connectors and subordinators

Deconstructed text

The first sentence is an example:

I lifted my leg high.
I stepped over the chain.

Lifting my leg high, I stepped over the hotel guardhouse chain.

I started walking under the light of the electric lamp posts.
I started feeling the wind.
The wind was blowing.
It blew on the deserted ocean-side.
The ocean-side was in Natal.

The path invited me to run.
The path was for bikes.
The path was smooth.
The path was along the shore.

There was the sound of the waves.
The waves were on the rocky beach.
The sound drew my attention to the horizon.
The horizon was light gray.
The horizon blended up into the darker sky.
The sky was speckled with stars.
The stars were twinkling.

I started to run.
I imagined the sun.
The sun was shining on me.
The sun was warming the wind.
The wind was cool.
The wind pierced through my sweatshirt.

My breathing was steady in a few minutes.
My pace was steady in a few minutes.
There was a ball.
It was warm.
It was light golden.
It was appearing on the horizon.
It was changing its backdrop.
The changing was to orange, salmon, gray and light blue.

There were ripples.
The ripples were on the surface of the water.
The water was calm.
The ripples indicated good weather.
The weather was good for this first day of vacation.

Example of Deconstruction Exercise Based on Original Student Text That Has Been Revised

An Amazing Day

I had an unforgettable day in this amazing beach called Serpilho, located in Rio de Janeiro, in the town of Trindade, right on the border of São Paulo. The place looks like a dream: it is a small uninhabited beach on the open sea.

It was one of the best surfing days of my life. The sunny Summer day was completed by perfect round waves. I was there surfing on my own, completely alone. I felt like I belonged to that place. My body felt the natural environment and my soul traveled light and free with the soft wind that turned the intense sunshine into a pleasant thing.

That is what surfing is about when translated into words: it is a magical thing; it is a therapy of mind which brings you closely in touch with nature. Surfing is trying to dominate the power of the oceans - the waves.

Student: André

Deconstructed Text

The first sentence is done as an example:

I had a day.
It was unforgettable.
The day was at this amazing beach.
The beach is called Serpilho.
It is in the town of Trindade.
It is right on the border of São Paulo.

I had an unforgettable day at this amazing beach called Serpilho located in the town of Trindade, Rio de Janeiro, right on the border of São Paulo.

The place looks like a dream
It is a small beach.
It is uninhabited.
It is on the open sea.

That was a surfing day.
It was one of the best days of my life.

The day was sunny.
It was a Summer day.
It was completed by waves.
The waves were perfect.
The waves were round.

I felt like I belonged to that place.
I was there surfing.
I was on my own.
I was completely alone.

My body felt the environment.
The environment was natural.
My soul traveled light.
My soul traveled free.
My soul traveled with the soft wind.
The soft wind turned the sunshine into a pleasant thing.
The sunshine was intense.

That is what surfing is about.
Surfing is translated into words.
Surfing is a magical thing.
Surfing is a therapy of mind.
Surfing brings you closely in touch with nature.

Surfing is trying to dominate the power of the oceans
The power of the oceans is the waves.

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EXAMPLE OF DECONSTRUCTION OF DESCRIPTIVE TEXT BY A NATIVE SPEAKER -

A person

Pepere picked up the cane, shifted his weight, leaned on it with two hands and looked somewhere beyond me. His thick suspenders held his belly up in the air. Sparse white hairs lined the top of his thick undershirt. Under the hair his skin was pink. he could have been Irish with a complexion like that, but I knew he was French by the way he laughed and favored the fat parts of the pig over the lean ones. Maybe he was pink because he had eaten so much pork in his lifetime.

Gisele

The first sentence is done as an example:

Pepere picked up the cane.
He shifted his weight.
He leaned on it.
He leaned with two hands.
He looked somewhere beyond me.

Pepere picked up the cane, shifted his weight, leaned on it with two hands and looked somewhere beyond me.

His suspenders held his belly.
His suspenders were thick.
They held his belly up in the air.

He had sparse hairs on his chest.
They were white.
They lined the top of his undershirt.
His undershirt was thick.

Under the hairs his skin could be seen.
His skin was pink.

He could have been Irish with a complexion like that.
I knew he was French.
I knew it by the way he laughed.
I knew it by the way he favored the fat parts of the pig.
He favored the fat ones over the lean ones.

Maybe he was pink because he had eaten so much pork in his lifetime.

EXAMPLE OF DECONSTRUCTION EXERCISE BASED ON STUDENT'S TEXT WITH ORGANIZATION, SENTENCE LENGTH OR SENTENCE STRUCTURE PROBLEMS

1. Excerpt of first draft of description

> The Contrast Makes the Beauty
>
> ... In the middle of a very dense florest there is a very mystic place.
>
> The water comes down from a beautiful water fall and continues it's course as a small river filled with rocks of all shapes and sizes.
>
> The water is very clear and freezing. When it hits the rocks at the bottom of the water fall, the water splashes all around, so that the only thing you can hear is the water sound.
>
> This is a very cool and humid place and it is also very foggy during almost all day long.
>
> The sky is usually very blue with the sun shining. The sun rays is able to pass through the trees at this certain area.
>
> It's a very pretty scene when the sun rays reach the water and make it shine. The brightness of the water makes a contrast with the dark ground filled with dry leaves from the trees.
>
> This place has a mix of colors, brightness from the water and the green background made of beautiful trees. The fog makes this place even more magic and peaceful. ...
>
> *Student: Fernanda*

Deconstructed Text (with sentence transition clues *optional*)

The water comes down from a beautiful waterfall.
The water continues its course as a small river. *(and)*
The river is filled with rocks of all shapes and sizes.

The water is very clear.
The water is freezing. *(when)*
The water hits the rocks.
The rocks are at the bottom of the waterfall. *(so / so that /then)*
The water splashes all around.
The only thing you can hear is the sound of the water

This is a cool and humid place.
It is very foggy *(that / to cover)*
It is foggy all day long.

The sky is very blue.
The sun is shining.
The sun rays are able to pass through the trees. *(while / as)*
They pass in certain areas.

It is a pretty scene. *(with)*
The sun rays reach the water. *(reaching / making*
They make the water shine. *(and)*

The water is bright.
The water contrasts with the ground.
The ground is dark.
The ground is filled with leaves from the trees.
The leaves are dry.

2. Example of a text with organization problems

> ... "It was a typical day in that hidden island which could be anywhere on the vast ancient ocean. The cloudy sky made it slightly sad, and the anger of the wind seemed to disturb the sea's deep waters. The weather was particularly cold, therefore the light rain turned into ice. This glacial scenery was made up of infinite shades of blue and gray. On the beach, the dark and hard sand. There were *imponent* mountains right after the rocky sand, not very far from the sea, and in some places, the waves could even reach the rocks, going with violence against it - this made impressive noises." ...
>
> *Student: Alexandres*

Deconstructed text

It was a glacial scenery.
This scenery was made of infinite shades.
The shades were of blue, brown and green.

First, there was a beach.
There was sand on the beach.
The sand was dark.
The sand was hard.
The sand was rocky.

Suggestions to use: *bordered by*

There were mountains.
The mountains were high.
The mountains were imposing.
The mountains were behind the rocky beach.
The mountains were not far from the beach.
In some places the waves could hit the rocks.
The rocks were at the foot of the mountain.
The hitting made impressive sounds.

Suggestions to use:
laid / framed
and so close that... /
at such short distance that...
making...

NOTE: In this exercise, the teacher does some *rearranging* to help with the reorganization. This *rearranging* can be supplied in the exercise or elicited and added, systematically, when the teacher and the students do the exercise together.

CONCLUSIONS

Some of our observations are:

1. The expanded sentence patterns do not become active performance immediately. Effective results surface after two or three exercises or in further writing. However, the patterns are then definitively incorporated to the student's writing style. They acquire the ability to choose when to use long or short sentences in view of the writing style.
2. Students respond positively to the activity recognizing its importance to the improvement of their use of language; particularly on their sentence structure.
3. The data comparison chart and personal observations show positive results for some intermediate and upper-intermediate students (See appendix for examples of students' writing). We started collecting data with lower level classes and we do not yet have conclusive information; but we learned that participating teachers are enthusiastic about its potential and students respond positively to the exercise itself because they enjoy the challenge of its puzzle-like format.

Our personal experience has shown text reconstruction is an efficient teaching tool for several reasons:

- ☑ This is the result of action research. A qualitative study can be done.
- ☑ it helps both the student and the teacher during the revision process because it makes it
  - ✓ more challenging,
  - ✓ less time-consuming, and
  - ✓ more student-focused;
- ☑ it allows for multiple answers which reflect variations of fluency and style;
- ☑ it teaches adequate sentence structure for written discourse;
- ☑ it makes students reflect about the relationship among the sentences;
- ☑ it makes students visualize what is meant by the simple sentences and compare them to their synonymous expanded sentence;
- ☑ it makes redundant elements clearer;
- ☑ it makes students use the grammatical forms they have learned before but have not yet become part of their active language;
- ☑ it is challenging and fun to do; it allows for different types of classroom interaction;
- ☑ most of all, it has a definite impact on the quality of the students' writing.

STUDENT'S OPINIONS ABOUT THE EXERCISE:

"...The exercise was very good. It was completely necessary to improve my way of writing and to see how I could combine sentences in my text to make it clear and even more interesting. I think this exercise was one of the most important to really improve our writing..."

"...Sometimes they are hard to do. It helps us to learn how to better make the long sentences in our texts. It's important to make us pay attention to our texts so that we don't write just a lot of short sentences that could be combined..."

"...Those exercises were very helpful in showing us how we can join sentences which seem dull and repetitive when they are separated, turning those sentences into more fluent, stylistic sentences. The exercises have also shown us how to eliminate some unnecessary words. ..."

"...For me those sentence combining exercises improved the construction of sentences by reducing useless words and connections. It also made me improve the uses of commas and periods. ..."

"...I didn't like that kind of exercise, but they were really important to me because they made me think more about the construction of my sentences. They helped me to correct my mistakes and to improve my writing..."

"I enjoyed it a lot. I think it's very intelligent and everybody worked on it or gave his opinion. After we decided what the right answer was, people tried to understand why. We should have more of these exercises."

"I think it is a good exercise to encourage students to start writing whenever they don't know how to begin a sentence."

"I think it was a pretty good exercise to practice the usual form of English because we are used to constructing *phrases* using very long sentences."

"I think it was a good experience because we never use "interface" words in our texts, or, if we do it, they are always the same. Then when we have all sentences ready, we can really care about correction and try to use special ones..."

TEACHER'S OPINIONS ABOUT THE EXERCISE:

"Writing needs practice. This is a good way to practice if the objective is clear and matches with the material that students have already had. This exercise worked because my class had already studied adjective clauses and order of adjectives. I liked this kind of activity and I'd like to try out some ideas I had on how to introduce the exercise.

Salete

This exercise was very involving; my students accepted the challenge of reconstructing the sentences and persevered until they finished the wole thing. Their writing assignments after this showed that they had begun writing in natural English less influenced by Portuguese. I'm going to do this again and more often with shorter texts to begin with.

Andrea

This is a good inductive exercise. The students were scared about trying it but curious. They realized that they could construct and re-construct sentences in English.

Marcelo

DATA COMPARISON CHART (upper intermediate and advanced level)

Student	sentences in 1st draft	sentences in 2nd draft	range words/ sentences in 1st draft	range words/ sentences in 2nd draft	# of AND in 1st draft	# of AND in 2nd draft	# of BE in 1st draft	# of BE in 2nd draft
Juliana	22	13	9(5-6) 9(8-10) 2(15) 1(30)	6(12-15) 2(7-8) 1(16) 1(28)	0	0	11	2
Tatiana	17	5	1(25) 6(5-6) 2(11) 5(14)	2(35) 2(25) 1(9)	4	2	10	3
Fernanda	13	9	7(8-14) 2(17) 3(27)	4(24-26) 5(12-17)	3	2	7	2
Tommy	20	12	11(4-6) 8(10-15) 1(33)	8(10-12) 2(16) 1(38) 1(29)	8	2	6	3
Alexandre	12	10	6(11-13) 3(18-21) 1(28) 1(36) 1(7)	3(12-15) 4(18-21) 1(28) 1(43)	1	1	4	4

NOTE: THE IMPROVEMENT IN SENTENCE LENGHTH AND RANGE OF WORDS PER SENTENCE FOR FERNANDA WAS NOT AS DRAMATIC AS THE OTHERS. AS WITH ALEXANDRE, HER PROGRESS WAS IN ORGANIZATION AND CLARITY.

violence against it - this made impressive noises. With those heavy gray clouds the mountains' top couldn't be viewed. Actually, you could see nearly nothing due to a humid fog on the beach. You could only see shapes and shadows around that place (and if I was there, I wouldn't want to find out what those things really were); maybe strange or unknown animals. ...

Excerpt of second draft after two reconstruction exercises

...It was a typical day in that hidden island which could be anywhere on the vast ancient ocean. The cloudy sky made it slightly sad, and the anger of the wind seemed to disturb the sea's deep waters. The weather was particularly cold. Therefore the light rain turned into ice, making a scenery of infinite shades of blue and gray.

There were high imponent mountains, not far from the dark, hard rocky beach. In some places the waves could even hit the rocks in the bottom of the mountains violently, making impressive sounds. With those heavy clouds, the mountains' top couldn't be viewed. Actually, you could see almost nothing due to humid fog on the shore except some shapes and shadows around that place (and if I was there, I wouldn't want to find out what those things really were); maybe strange or unknown animals. ...

Excerpt of first draft of text after four reconstruction exercises

...Suddenly, I started seeing verdant plains, very far from the place I was, where knights were riding their black and white horses.

It was a warm day - a very unusual weather in that place. Before those distant plains, there was a beautiful garden that seemed to surround the building from which I was looking. There was also a small, clear-watered lake in which many ducks were swimming. I could hear many birds singing and sometimes wolves yowling...

4. Student - Fernanda

Excerpt of first draft of description before reconstruction exercises:

The Contrast Makes the Beauty

...In the middle of a very dense *florest* there is a very mystic place.

The water comes down from a beautiful water fall and continues it's course as a small river filled with rocks of all shapes and sizes.

The water is very clear and freezing. When it hits the rocks at the bottom of the water fall, the water splashes all around, so that the only thing you can hear is the water sound.

This is a very cool and humid place and it is also very foggy during almost all day long.

The sky is usually very blue with the sun shining. The sun rays is able to pass through the trees at this certain area.

It's a very pretty scene when the sun rays reach the water and make it shine. The brightness of the water makes a contrast with the dark ground filled with dry leaves from the trees.

This place has a mix of colors, brightness from the water and the green background made of beautiful trees. The fog makes this place even more magic and peaceful. ...

Excerpt of second draft after one reconstruction exercise based on a student text.

...In the middle of a very dense florest there is a mystic place.

The water comes down from a beautiful waterfall and continues *it's* course as a small river filled with rocks of all shapes and sizes.

The clear freezing water comes from the waterfall and when it hits the rocks at the bottom, splashes all around - making a overwhelming sound.

The waterfall's mist makes the woods humid and cool almost all day.

Above the *florest* the sun shines in the blue sky and in this certain area the sun rays are able to pass through the trees. A very pretty scene happens when the sun rays reach the water and makes it shine. The brightness of the water contrasts with the dark ground filled with dry leaves from the trees.

This place has a mixture of colors: the darkness of the rocks and ground, brightness of the water and the green background made of beautiful trees. The mist turn this place to be more magic and peaceful.

Excerpt of First draft of text after 4 reconstruction exercises.

Old but Efficient

...Mr. Arnold Rothstein used to be a kind of a *men* who all the burglars looked up for. Brave and always successful he made history.

As the years passed by, Mr. Arnold, old, could no longer handle the difficult achievements. At this moment the was first robbing little valuable objects from people's houses.

On a beautiful Saturday, Mr. Arnold pulled his nice car in the chosen building driveway. The door keeper stared at the vehicle for a little while and then opened the front gate.

Our burglar stopped the car by the employee and asked him if there was any resident out of town so that he could park his car in the parking spot to visit his aunt.

As the door keeper told him that there was nobody at the tenth floor, Mr. Arnold had his destination set up. Mr. Fearless parked the car, took the elevator and then, at the tenth floor he didn't take more than two minutes to break into the apartment.

It was a big place, filled of nice and expensive rugs and electronic equipment, but none of that interested him for being hard to be carried away...

APPENDIX

SAMPLES OF STUDENT'S WORK BEFORE AND AFTER RECONSTRUCTION EXERCISES

1. Student - Juliana:

Excerpt of first draft of description before reconstruction exercise:

The Beauty of Nature

...There's a enormous curved beach. The nature is everywhere. There are only simple houses around the beach. Everything is at the same time primitive and very beautiful.

It's summer. The temperature increases while the time *runs*. The day is very light. The sun shines strongly. The sky is blue and *clean*. There's no clouds in it. A lot of birds fly in the sky together, making fantastic designs....

The sea is very crowded, there are boats and jet-skis of all sizes, people are surfing, windsurfing, swimming and having a lot of fun.

The waves are very strong. They break strongly on the beach with a loud noise.

The sand is also very clean and hot. It's so thin that the wind *take* it along as it *pass* softly. ...

Excerpt of second draft after one reconstruction exercise based on students' texts and another based on an original text.

...A enormous beach shows it majesty. The nature dominates everything and only simple houses are built around. The scenery *contents* at the same time primitive and beautiful images.

The temperature in summer increases while time runs. The strong sun makes a *lighty* day, while the blue sky *keeps clean* with no clouds. A lot of birds fly in the sky together, making fantastic designs.

The sea is very crowded of boats and jet-skis of all sizes. People are surfing, swimming and having a lot of fun, while the strong waves break with a loud noise on the beach where the hot, clean, thin sand is taken softly away when the wind passes...

2. Student: Tatiana

PEACE (First draft of text before reconstruction exercise)

...It was a very small beach. It's almost six o'clock, at dawn, and the weather is quite hot. The wind is blowing softly, moving the few clouds that are on the sky. The sun is half appearing at the horizon over the ocean and it's very red; it gives red and pink colors to the sky and to the water, painting a wonderful scene.

The beach is curve and small; it seems like a shell. The day is still very bright, having a red coloration in contrast with the white sand. There are some trees along the sand, which are waving at the wind.

There's no one at the beach, that seems completely empty. There are just few sea gulls flying high in circles. Very far, at the red ocean, is a small white boat that seems not to move.

The beach is very quiet. Just the sound of the birds, the softly sound of small waves hitting the sand and of the wind on the leaves can be heard.

It's a peaceful place, which is able to relax anyone....

Revised version after doing two reconstruction exercises of student's texts and a couple of teacher comments on condensation and word order

...In a small curved beach that seems like a shell the hot wind is blowing softly, waving the trees' leaves along the white sand and moving the few clouds in the dawn sky.

The intense red sun is half appearing at the horizon, coloring the ocean in different shadows in a wonderful bright day sight.

The beach is completely empty but for some seagulls flying high in circles. Very far is a still small white boat, alone at the red ocean.

It's very quiet; just the sound of the birds, the softly sound of small waves hitting the sand and of the wind on the leaves can be heard on this peaceful and relaxing place. ...

Excerpt of a first draft of narrative after doing four reconstruction exercises

What a night!

...It was a typical small country city night - calm, warm, the bright moon shining high on a dark sky.

Peter was driving his car on the main road, thinking how pleasant would be a shower after that long day at the office, when he saw a well dressed middle aged man waving to him at the street.

Thinking he could be a tourist needing some information - a very common scene in the city - Peter, a polite man, decided to stop, opening the car's window, waiting for the supposed question.

The inoffensive tourist pointed a gun at Peter's head and opened violently the car's door, forcing the frightened man to pass to the passenger's seat. From behind a tree came another guy who was also carrying a gun and entered on the back seat of the car. ...

3 Student - Alexandre

Excerpt of first draft of narrative before reconstruction exercise.

...It was a typical day in that hidden island which could be anywhere on the vast ancient ocean. The cloudy sky made it slightly sad, and the anger of the wind seemed to disturb the sea's deep waters. The weather was particularly cold, therefore the light rain turned into ice. This glacial scenery was made up of infinite shades of blue and gray. On the beach, the dark and hard sand. There were imponent mountains right after the rocky sand, not very far from the sea, and in some places, the waves could even reach the rocks, going with

SAMPLE TEXT TO PLAY WITH

CARNAVAL

Carnaval in Rio is known the world over especially for its three night-long parades of the *Escolas de Samba*. Every night seven samba schools, featuring 4,000 dancers each, bedazzle 50,000 spectators on the *sambadrome* - a specially built avenue flanked by bleachers and stalls, and floodlit like daylight.

This unique, glittering, contagious dancing event actually represents, to the poor community of each samba school, the realization of yearlong preparations. Under the supervision of a master *carnaval*-maker, carpenters, metal workers, painters, artists, seamstresses, drummers and dancers work hard to present their theme and song to the public. The result is a parade of colorful, shimmering floats. On them topless starlets, sculptural males and jet-setters in luxuriously embroidered costumes bounce happily on pedestals to the tune of their samba. Down on the avenue, several wings of dancers wearing elaborate sequined costumes often topped by headdresses with plumes and ornaments interplay with the floats to illustrate the theme.

The key tone is the joyfulness and friendliness of these people who are there to make the spirit of *carnaval* be reborn over and over again.